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Meeting to air issues on weapons site

Corps of Engineers to provide information after advisory board claims potential leak

By Aaron Besecker

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LEWISTON — A public meeting will be held Wednesday on the ongoing investigation into environmental contamination at a former federal weapons site in northwest Niagara County.

Representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers will present information about the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and Niagara Falls Storage Site in a session scheduled for 6 to 9 p. m. in the senior citizens center, 4361 Lower River Road.

The Niagara Falls Storage Site, a 191-acre section of the ordnance works, includes a 10-acre cell built in the 1980s to hold radiological wastes. The structure — known as the Interim Waste Containment Structure — may be leaking, an advisory group to federal regulators has warned.

Army Corps officials have said that, contrary to the claims by the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Restoration Advisory Board, they believe data indicates the cell is not leaking.

The advisory board — a volunteer group of local residents, academics and industry professionals—says the issue figures prominently in the decision on whether the radioactive substances will remain buried in Niagara County.

A statement issued last week by an agency spokesman read, in part, “We look forward to discussing these projects with the community at the upcoming meeting and will be available to respond to their questions.”

The corps and the advisory board have been at odds for several years over access to the agency’s technical experts and data, as well as allowable suggestions from the board. The state attorney general’s office has supported the board, calling the agency’s revocation of the board’s status and its attempt to form a new board “illegal and misguided.”

In July 2008, three months after the state attorney general’s office came forward, the corps announced it was dropping its attempt to form a new advisory board but has yet to return to the previous level of interaction with the group.

Last September, at a public meeting that included presentations filled with scientific jargon, members of the public called on the agency to reengage the more technically savvy advisory board.

The former ordnance works site, which covers about 7,500 acres in the towns of Lewiston and Porter, also is being investigated for chemical contamination. Only about a third of the site was “developed” after the federal government took control of it in 1941, officials have said.

About 2,500 acres were used for about nine months to produce TNT, although the Defense Department continued to use the property for decades.

The Corps of Engineers assumed responsibility for the site’s cleanup in 1997.

The 7,500-acre site now includes the Lewiston-Porter campus and CWM Chemical Services’ hazardous waste landfill, as well as other privately owned land.

For more information about the ongoing investigation, visit the Army Corps’ Web site:

www.lrb.usace.army.mil/derpfuds/loow-nfss/index.htm/.

abesecker@buffnews.com

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